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ABSTRACT

This bibliography lists approximately 200 books and articles on the subject of Black English for practical use by students interested in linguistic analysis and by educators. The listing is divided into seven sections: Linguistic Analysis--Linguistics and Culture; Lexicons, Word Lists, Glossaries; Vocabularies; Verbal Art; Nonverbal Communication; Gullah and the History of Black English; Education; and Curriculum. In her introductory remarks, the author describes her rationale for selection of materials; works presenting a negative attitude toward Black English have not been included. (VM)

BLACK ENGLISH: A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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In preparing any bibliography one must make decisions from the outset. Is it to be comprehensive or selective? Is it for research or for applied purposes? If the bibliography is to be selective, as this one is, what are the rationale for choices?

This bibliography has been prepared with a bias. As a linguist, who "hears" and accepts a language or dialect for what it is, I cannot agree with the negative judgments made about Black English which appear in professional journals. After spending some time as a consultant to the schools in a Black English project and doing further study, I was impressed with the varieties and versatility of the language of Black people. In an article which some students and I wrote recently, we concluded that Black English "is a language of power and vitality. Besides exemplifying the well-known abilities of rhyming and rhythm, it is a language rich in vocabulary, much of which is not known to the mainstream community; creative in metaphor; innovative in compounding and replete with subtleties or irony and humor, which undoubtedly result from the exigencies for survival." (Key, Fiege-Kollmann, and Smith in Section I.)[1]

With this in mind, this bibliography has been prepared with a positive approach to the language of the youngsters who too often have been in the category of "drop outs." The reader will note that a significant proportion of the entries are recently published. Increasingly, educators and scholars are becoming aware of the dialect

of Black English as the knowledge of it is being unfolded to the mainstream community in this recent sociological-psychological-black-is-beautiful atmosphere.

Understanding and appreciating the richness of Black English could enhance lines of communication between the Black and White communities, particularly in education. This approach is not a panacea and should not be used in blind faith. But it could be a bridge to carry the Black child over to the language of the mainstream of society, which, in turn, he and she must learn and understand to function along with the major population. It should be emphasized here that the language represented in the bibliography is not the language of all Black people. The language of those persons who have been reared in educated families or who have already learned mainstream English is not the language of the Black English with which this bibliography is concerned.

Also, it should be emphasized that Black English, as all languages and dialects, has many varieties. As early as 1836, social varieties in the speech of the slaves were noted by Nathaniel Beverly Tucker who asserted that there were two types of slave speech in the South, that of the field servants and that of the house servants. Furthermore, he noted that the people were versatile in code-switching. As an example, he has one of his characters in The Partisan Leader change from his standard English to the dialect of the field hands when he wanted to "mislead stupid Yankee invaders." (From McDowell in Section V.)

The bibliography is intended for use of students who are interested in linguistic analysis and persons in education. It is meant to be of practical use. Therefore, I have not included some worthwhile titles

because of the difficulty or impossibility of obtaining these items. I have included some items that pre-date the recent linguistic understanding of Black English because they seem to be of historical interest. The first sections are of interest for linguistic research; the last sections are of interest to educators, though these divisions should not be held too rigidly. Some of the entries are collections of articles and usually the individual articles are not listed again.

Section I contains entries that treat linguistic and cultural structures, mostly the former since the bibliography focuses on language.

Section II covers vocabulary items. One will note that many of the words listed in the glossaries and lexicons are familiar, but the glosses reflect a wide variety of meanings. Some of these have found their way into mainstream English, such as dig, cool, blood brother, bread (for money). Some of the words cited can be traced back to earlier dialects of English, for example, Seidelman (in Section V). Some of the words listed have emerged from a secret language to a public language. One can be assured that there remains undercover an always changing secret language that has not yet found its way into print. In a discussion of Black English, one must deal with the sensitive area of taboo vocabulary. One cannot get very far into the literature without encountering terms which have been forbidden to "nice" people in the mainstream community, particularly women or others in the presence of women. Observations of the use of such terms immediately show vastly different usage from the mainstream community. They occur in styles of speech where they do not occur in the counterpart styles of speech in the mainstream. To understand this, one must go

back a few hundred years when these terms were first introduced to the slave people. They were foreign terms to the Black community, and no matter what the impact they had or have among white English speakers, they could not possibly have had the same impact on these people who had recently come from speaking Twi, Yoruba, Gola, Hausa, Wolof, or whatever language they had spoken in West Africa. It must also be noted that all of the taboo words in question, as far as I have been able to discover, are of Old English origin -- none of them are of African origin.

Section III contains discussions of a large range of verbal art. Much of the structured verbal expression of highly articulate Black speakers could be classified under oral literature. Before the time of phonographs and tape recorders, this genre was lost forever, except what few things were written down by persistent collectors such as Joel Chandler Harris, and then, we must acknowledge that some changes in the language could have taken place between the verbal outpouring and the slow recording of pen and paper. Several genres are represented in this section. For sermons, see Franklin, C.J. Johnson, James Weldon Johnson, King, Mitchell, Rice, and Rosenberg. For story-telling and folklore, see Anon, Shine and the Titanic, Abrahams, Botkin, Dorson, Dundes, and Harris. For oratory, see Boulware, King, Smith and others under sermons. For intricate speech styles, see Lambert, Moody and the following in Verbal Art. For Verbal Art, see Abrahams, Botkin, Dollard, Elton, Hannerz, Kochman, Labov, et al, McCormick, McDaniel, and Stearns. For children's rhymes and games, see Castro, Jones and Hawes, and in Section III, Hawes and Eberlein.

Throughout the articles in this section is seen a sophisticated use of alliteration, rhythm, assonance, and rhyming. In the sermons and oratory are noted extraordinary use of metaphors. Also to be noted is a very large range of terminology used to identify speech styles: rapping (from rhapsodizing), shucking, jiving, capping, signifying, checking, sounding, louding, jaw-jacking, woofing, shit-tow-ing, mau-mau-ing, running it down, copping a plea, toasting, skittin' n' skattin', fast-talking, loud-mouthing, sweet-mouthing, fat-mouthing, bad-mouthing, playing the dozens, macking, high siding, splib lippin', lugg dropping, show-boating, testifying, talking in tongues, blowing on, rapping and facking.

Section III is not comprehensive by any means. It is meant to be representative of the verbally ambidextrous speech styles of Black English. Some of the speech styles are exemplified in musical form, for example skittin' 'n skattin' can be heard in the scat-singing of Lambert; fast-talking can be heard in the fast-talk with a melodic line of Moody; and signifying can be heard in McDaniel. Appreciation of the varieties of Black English listed in Section III is enhanced by looking at the speech from a linguistic point of view. The use of vowel sounds shows an extraordinary ability with language in the following illustrations. John M. Jasper, a slave who became a famous preacher in post-Civil War times was known for his sermon "De Sun Do Move."[2] In his famous phrasing, he lists the great peoples of the earth:

/a/ /a/ /u/ /a/
The Hottentots, the Huguenots,

/æ/ /ɪ/ /ɛ/ /ɪ/ /ɛ/
The Abyssinians, and the Virginians.

On the stressed syllables, the first line contains back vowels; the second line contains front vowels, according to the vowel chart of English phonemes.

front	back	
i	u	high
I	U	
e	o	
ɛ		low
æ		
	a	

The next illustration is even more sophisticated in the use of vowel quality. The syllables represent the vowel chart, starting from high vowels and moving down the chart, again on the stressed syllables.

Whitey has /i/ beat, /I/ kicked, /e/ raped, and /a/ robbed,
/u/ used, /u/ abused, and made a /ʊ/ tool and a /ʊ/ fool
/o/ of niggas for four hundred years.

Much of the verbal expression displays a cunning play on words. Shirley Chisholm upheld the tradition of colorful language while on the hustings. She said of her competitors who were still in the talking stages, "While they're rapping and snapping, I'm mapping!"[3]

The well-known abilities of rhyming showed up in the speech of children recently in a free association test.[4] The black children in the experiment more often gave rhyming responses than the white child, even making up nonsense syllables: mack, mard, nigh, teasant, mo, mour,

birsty, mently and bently. Other words that rhymed were elicited: sheep for heap, hour for sour, bad, fad, and mad for add.

Section IV contains too few entries for a very large subject, Nonverbal Communication. Unfortunately, this area is not widely documented yet. Kenneth Johnson, well-know Black linguist, treats this subject in lectures, and we can hope that in the future more of this material will be available to a wider reading audience. Henry, and Horton bring to attention the different use of time among Black people, known as Colored People's Time or CPT. The first use of this term that I have found in the literature is, Anon, "Words, words, words," in 1940. Understanding the relationships of time concepts is crucial to the understanding of linguistic structures as found in the tense-aspect system of the verb in Black English. See Fickett in Section I.

Section V includes material that has to do with the backgrounds of Black English. Scholars will recognize the insightful and perceptive work of Lorenzo Dow Turner, renowned Negro scholar, who, along with Herskovits and Puckett, understood this language and its history long before linguists and language scholars became aware of it. It seems obvious, from studying even the limited material listed in Section V, that the history of Black English is a combination of various dialects of Early Modern English and inheritances from the native languages of West Africa. Historians and linguists interested in language change and historical developments may note that some of the features retained today are found in both of the contributors to Black English: dialects of Early Modern English (including Scots), and West African languages. It is this aspect of reinforcement which needs to be explored more.[5]

Sections VI and VII are concerned with the role of language in education. From these articles and books, one will note differences of opinion on whether to use Black English in the classroom, at what age to introduce Standard English, whether to use materials written in Black English, the interference of dialect in learning to read, and on and on. The truth is that none of these questions has been explored long enough to come to any rational conclusion. These ideas need further testing and acceptance when and where they work. Undoubtedly, the confusion surrounding Black English is advanced by the ambivalence which both the White and the Black community have toward Black English. The mainstream community has rejected Black English on the one hand because it approximates nonstandard or unacceptable English in some ways; for example, double negatives and use of verb forms. On the other hand the mainstream has eagerly incorporated colorful expressions and interesting vocabulary when it is expedient to do so, even as the mainstream community has adopted jazz and dance movements, and bright-colored clothes from Black innovators. The Black community is, perhaps, even more ambivalent and oscillating concerning Black English. The most charismatic of the Black leaders are the most articulate in the special styles of oral Black expression and narrative, whether that person be the old story-teller of long ago, or the Black preacher who leads his or her audience to unbearable participation, or the street man who tops them all in Playing the Dozens, an agonistic verbal duel to prove one's prowess. The use of Black English in any of these forms is adored and revered. But on the other side of town, Black English has not been accepted, or has been ridiculed, and the people know it. Therefore,

Black people have come to abhor that which they adore, have had to reject that which they are comfortable in, put aside what they learned was "wrong" and "incorrect," and learn to talk "proper" English.

Special mention should be made of the list of curricula, "Materials to Teach Oral Standard English," compiled by the Center for Applied Linguistics. This is a mimeo list of items from schools all over the nation, where new ideas are being tried in curriculum to meet the needs of speakers of Black English.

By perusing the bibliography one cannot help but be impressed with the wide variety and versatility of Black English, heretofore mostly unknown to the White community which has functioned for the most part without any awareness of the many styles and narratives. What of the future of Black English? It would be presumptious to try to prophesize, but whatever, it will be linguistically fascinating to follow its course as it moves along with attitudes changing, opinions softening and hardening, and the young, spirited generation seeing themselves in a new mirror as they express themselves. I hope that the bibliography will be useful to all.

Footnotes

[1] I want to express my appreciation to Ora Williams and Ernie Smith for their several contributions to this bibliography and for making suggestions on an earlier draft.

[2] Joseph C. Robert, The Story of Tobacco in America. Alfred Knopf, 1949, p. 91.

[3] Los Angeles Times, Friday, December 10, 1971.

[4] Doris R. Entwisle, "Semantic systems of children: some assessments of social class and ethnic differences," in Frederick Williams, ed., Language and Poverty, pp. 127-135.

[5] I have noted some of these features in an article, "The History of Black English," MS.

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